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The triangle of digitalization –sustainability and democracy within digital collaboration

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The keynote presentation discusses three theses concerning the triangle of digitalization, sustainability and democracy.

First: How we design this triangle will determine to a large extent the quality of our livelihoods and of our democracy. The question is not whether digitalization plays a crucial role, but how it will play out regarding sustainability and democracy.

Second: Digitalization has the potential to be a driving force for the needed transformation of the energy, transportation, building, industry and housing sectors on the path towards greenhouse gas neutrality and circular economy (e.g. European Green Deal). But so far it is more a driver for increased emissions and the use of resources than a limiting factor.

Third: The legitimization of democracy is based on two pillars: representation and deliberation. Digitalization has a huge potential to improve both representation (without people even being physically present) and deliberation. However, currently it rarely improves representation and it rapidly undermines deliberation in society. Digitalization can be used to increase transparency of governments and businesses and to limit their power, but it can also be used as an instrument to control people and cement power of businesses and governments.

At the end, the question will be raised whether time has come to stop using naively all kinds of digitalization as if different kinds of digitalization did not create very different but decisive path dependencies determining our future.

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